

# Guidance for Designing Special Education Services that Support State Standards

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## *Purpose*

This document provides general guidance on how programs and services for students with mild, moderate, and significant disabilities can be designed to provide rigorous instruction that meets the need of EVERY student while holding schools accountable for high expectations for ALL students.

## *Background*

Students with disabilities are part of the state accountability system that measures proficiency, progress, closing the achievement gap, and college/career readiness. They also participate in local, national and international assessments.

Approximately 1% of students enrolled in the district are instructed with an alternate curriculum aligned to the state standards, and are assessed with an alternate assessment aligned to alternate achievement standards. Currently, the state assessment aligned to alternate achievement standards is the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness – Alternate (STAAR-Alt). This is approximately 10% of students with disabilities.

The remaining 99% of students enrolled in the district (90% of students with disabilities), must participate in the district's standard curriculum aligned to state standards, and be assessed with the general state assessment-STAAR.

In HISD, students with disabilities have been served overwhelmingly, in segregated settings. They have been taught by Special Education teachers who often have students with different ability levels, who are functioning at various grade levels and need instruction in multiple subjects during an instructional period. This practice is contraindicated for students to effectively meet local, state, national, and international standards.

## *Assumptions*

The Office of Special Education Services operates with the following assumptions:

- Campus staff and leaders are responsible and accountable for educating every student that attends their school.



- Campus staff and leaders are the experts on their students, parents, and community.
- Campus leaders need flexibility and district support to make programmatic decisions that best meet the needs of their students.
- Campus leaders and staff are responsible for knowing and implementing evidenced-based/best practices approaches for the education of students receiving special education services.
- The role of personnel from the Office of Special Education Services is to provide support to the campus leader and staff to improve student outcomes while maintaining ongoing compliance with local policy, and state and federal requirements.

### *Program and Service Options*

In order to determine the most effective service delivery model consider the following:

#### **Considerations for Students Accessing the Alternate Curriculum**

- Have a clear understanding of which students are eligible to participate in the alternate curriculum aligned with alternate achievement standards, and which students will participate in the district's standard curriculum. The student's disability category or label are not the best indicator of placement; their strengths and needs better inform placement.
- The Unique Learning System (ULS) is the HISD alternate curriculum and is only appropriate for students with significant cognitive disabilities.
- Provide a **singular** focus for special education teachers that provide instruction on ULS. These teachers **cannot** be simultaneously responsible for providing instruction on the district's standard curriculum and ULS.
- Programs that currently serve students with significant cognitive disabilities who have been identified as needing the support of an alternate curriculum include:

Preparing Students for Independence (PSI)

Skills for Learning and Living (SLL)

Structured Learning Center (SLC)

#### **Considerations for Students Accessing the Standard Curriculum**

- Provide students with disabilities opportunities to receive rigorous academic first instruction with teachers who are experts in both **content** and **pedagogy**.



- Students with disabilities that participate in this model of instruction perform at higher levels than students who receive core instruction from a Special Education teacher in a separate classroom setting (Review of Special Education in the Houston Independent School District, Thomas Hehir and Associates).
- Assign Special Education teachers to **supplement** rigorous instruction using effective strategies, adaptations, and accommodations that are targeted to mitigate barriers caused by disability. Special Education teachers can provide Tier 3 intervention in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports model.
- Propose a model of programming for students with disabilities that focuses on improved student outcomes, and is best suited for **your students, in your community, given your staffing allocations**. Work with your Program Specialist and Senior Manager to ensure that the campus and district stay in compliance with local policy, and state and federal regulations.
- Continue with traditional models that have been effective in increasing student achievement and outcomes or look for alternate solutions to increase effectiveness.
- Traditional Special Education programming models for students with mild to moderate disabilities include:

Resource Room

Co-teaching

Content Mastery

In-Class Support

Behavior Support Class (BSC)

Preschoolers Achieving Learning Skills (PALS)

Traditional Special Education Programming	Alternate Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource</li> <li>• Content Mastery</li> <li>• Behavior Support Class</li> <li>• Co-teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tier 3 Intervention</li> <li>• Study Lab</li> <li>• Behavior Specialist</li> <li>• In-class Facilitation</li> </ul>



## *Proposed Special Education Teacher Roles*

Essentially Special Education teachers can be categorized in two distinct roles:

### **Alternate Curriculum Support Teacher**-SLC, SLL, PSI

These teachers implement the alternate curriculum and provide specially designed instructional rigor that supports satisfactory student performance on the STAAR Alternate Assessment, as well as post-secondary outcomes in the areas of literacy, independent living skills, and employment.

### **Standard Curriculum Support Teacher**-PALS, BSC, Resource, Co-Teacher, SLC, AI, VI

These teachers implement specially designed instructional rigor that include strategies and interventions that address the student's areas of need. Skill gaps that need to be addressed are defined in the student's Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE) and present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP). This targeted instruction supports grade level standards, satisfactory progress on the STAAR assessment, and post-secondary goals specific to college and career readiness.

## *Need for Professional Development*

The Offices of Special Education Services will offer a series of professional development opportunities throughout the school year to increase teacher capacity. Program Specialists and Teacher Development Specialists will also provide job-embedded coaching and support.

Special Education teachers who serve in the **Alternate Curriculum Support Teacher** role may need professional learning opportunities in the following areas:

- Unique Learning System Implementation
- Every Move Counts
- Progress monitoring
- IDEA
- UDL
- Connecting Full and Individual Evaluation, and Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance to IEP development

Special Education teachers who serve in the **Standard Curriculum Support Teacher** role may need professional learning opportunities in the following areas:

- Collaboration



- State standards for core content
- District curriculum
- Strategies-instruction, behavior, social-emotional
- Disability and its impact on learning
- Accommodations for instruction and assessment
- IDEA
- HB5
- Prescriptive interventions
- Guided reading
- Progress monitoring
- UDL
- Standards-based IEP
- Connecting Full and Individual Evaluation, and Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance to IEP development

### *Support*

We recognize that the guidance in this document is general. The Office of Special Education Services is available to offer specific guidance to best meet the needs of your students. The Program Specialist assigned to your campus and Senior Manager for your level are ready to provide personalized support for your campus team.

